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8 Part II / Saturday, December 19, 1981 Los Angeles Times

Pop Reading: L.A. Band Poets, Gonzoid Critic

Poetry is an extremely dense art form, usually so loaded with portentous content that it can barely hold itself erect. Still, words are the best tools of touch we have, and occasionally it's nice to encounter them in a formal presentation, stripped of fancy musical packaging.

A handful of Los Angeles poets, four of whom were moonlighting from popular local bands, presented their words on Wednesday night at the First Unitarian Church to an eccentrically mixed crowd of 150 who hooted and applauded in the appropriate places.

Opening the two-hour program was Chris Desjardine, guiding light of the cerebral-punk Flesheaters. Desjardins intoned his apocalyptic visions in a rushed monotone that rubbed them of their full dramatic weight. His writing is too rich and complex to be digested at such a rapid clip.

Next up was Dave Alvin of the rockabilly-blues Blasters. His humorous essays on won-and-lost masculinity were delivered with a relaxed back-porch intimacy ideally matched to the sentiments being expressed.

Richard Meltzer is a Renaissance man who has written lyrics for Blue Oyster Cult, as well as reams of insipiringly gonzoid criticism covering everything from boxing to food. However, biology—sex in particular—is the central theme in most of his work, and he addresses matters of the flesh in no uncertain terms. Not for the squeamish, Meltzer is a man with a dirty mind and a pure heart, and the two collide to wonderful effect in his writing.

Closing the evening were John Doe and Exene Cervenka, lyricists for X. Prior to becoming the punk sensations of Los Angeles, they were poets and in fact met at Beyond Baroque, a poetry workshop in Venice. Doe gave the evening's most dramatic and graceful reading, simply because he resisted cramming too many words into the space of a second and gave his lines room to breath. Tossing out fragmented images and the tiny details that become handles on memories, he opened the door on past episodes of love, lust, innocence and corruption.

Cervenka read a selection from a soon-to-be-published book titled "Adulterers Anonymous," which she co-wrote with artist/musician Lydia Lunch. Like X's music. Wednesday's excerpt was a montage of blood, tears, Catholicism, America, racism, the vagabond life of a touring band and love, knit together with equal parts rage and compassion. She speaks her words with the same fierce dignity that she sings them and her reading was strong, strange and beautiful.

—KRISTINE McKENNA

TILSON THOMAS

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welcome figure on the podium of the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion.

Thursday night, bowing to the prerogatives of his celebrated soloist, he did attend to the splashy, bum-along duties (actually, Tilson Thomas likes to whistle along) of the oh-so-familiar Violin Concerto. He provided a bright, brisk, enthusiastic, clean, propulsive, sympathetic showcase for the inevitable star turn of Pinchas Zukerman.

When he had the stage to himself, however, he opted for Tchaikovskian esoterica. the economical—everything is relative—mood painting of the "Storm" overture, written when the master was a mere 24, and the luxurious sprawl of the "Manfred" symphony, a product of the master's indulgent maturity.

"The Storm," which our Philharmonic last weathered, for Tilson Thomas, in some run-out concerts four years ago, is an engaging example of brash, romantic, pictorialism. It is lush, sentimental and moody, in a marvelously primitive and compelling way.

"Manfred," which the orchestra last assayed for Lorin Maazel in 1973, is something of a musical white elephant. It. rumbles onward and sideward for nearly an hour, sometimes gets tangled in its own morass or rhetorical strands, beats some ideas to death and abandons others before they have even begun to stir, and whenever feasible pulls out all the histrionic stops.

Before this remarkably original evocation of Byron has trudged its convoluted course, its dazzles the senses, lulls the spirit, bludgeons the intellect and dabbles in some mightily impressive crashes, bams, whomps and slurps.

In its own preposterous, overblown way, it is rather wonderful. It gives us, without whimper or apology, Tchaikovsky's Technicolored visions of the "March of the Hippos," "The Waltz of the Dying Sylpha," "The Charge of the Dark Brigade," "Natasha Magdalena's Song Book," "The Grosse Quasi-Fugue" and "The Melancholy Bacchanal," among other obscure splendors.

Tilson Thomas, who seems to be going through a dramatic jumping-pretty-swooping-spinning-dancing period, roused the Philharmonic to lucid, propulsive, razor-sharp deafening performances. He did not approximate the lush, throbbing, burnished lones favored by Russian conductors and orchestras in this repertory, but there was plenty of persuasion in his own cool-and-brilliant approach.

The orchestra, incidentally, has retreated to its old behind-the-proceenium configuration, and the extended stage apron has been abandoned. When the Philharmonic introduced its new forward-thrust stage in October, the management apparently had overlooked the

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